

VZCZCXRO8728

PP RUEHAG RUEHCHI RUEHCN RUEHDBU RUEHDE RUEHDT RUEHHM RUEHKUK
RUEHLH RUEHPW RUEHROV
DE RUEHBHD #0320/01 2980543
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 250543Z OCT 07
FM AMEMBASSY BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3995
INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
RUCNISL/ISLAMIC COLLECTIVE
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 0046
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM 0021
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN 000320

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/25/2017

TAGS: PREL IS BX

SUBJECT: Abbas Visit to Brunei

REF: A. KUALA LUMPUR 1552 (NOTAL)

¶B. JAKARTA 2968 (NOTAL)

Classified By: Ambassador Emil Skodon for Reasons 1.4 (B, D)

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Palestinian Authority (PA) President Abbas paid a low-key visit to Brunei to brief Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah on preparations for the proposed Annapolis international meeting. He outlined plans for over 30 countries to attend and sketched out a pathway for negotiations leading to Palestinian statehood and a two-state solution, to include a popular referendum on an eventual peace treaty. We understand the PA has suggested that the Government of Brunei (GOB) be invited to the planned Paris donors conference in December, despite its negative view of past GOB parsimoniousness, and we speculate that the Abbas visit may have had more to do with paving the way for GOB financial support in Paris (and possibly beforehand) than with Annopolis. Despite broad interest in the peace process among Bruneians and widespread sympathy for the Palestinians, we do not believe the GOB will join the Malaysians and Indonesians in seeking an invitation to Annopolis, nor will it look for a prominent role in Paris. End Summary.

LOW-KEY VISIT

¶2. (U) PA President Mahmud Abbas visited Bandar Seri Begawan October 23-24. He was accompanied by PA Minister of Information and Foreign Affairs Al-Malaki, Presidential Advisor Zaid, Representative in Malaysia Abu Ghoush, and Protocol Chief Ewaida. The Palestinians met with a GOB team comprised of Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah, Crown Prince Billah, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade I Prince Mohamed, and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade II Lim Jock Seng. Abbas and the Sultan also held a separate one-on-one meeting.

¶3. (SBU) Brunei was the third Muslim-majority country visited by Abbas during his current swing through Southeast Asia, and a much lower-profile stop than in Malaysia or Indonesia (reflets). Unlike in Kuala Lumpur and Jakarta, Abbas participated in no public media events during his stay in Bandar Seri Begawan. In a break from the standard practice during visits by heads of government or the equivalent, members of the diplomatic corps and non-GOB Bruneians were not invited to the banquet hosted by the

Sultan for his visitor nor to the airport arrival ceremony. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade protocol department informed us that this was because Abbas' trip was considered a "working" visit rather than a "state" or "official" visit.

BRIEFING GOB ON ANNAPOLIS, AND BEYOND

¶4. (U) In an interview with the Borneo Bulletin daily (owned by ForMin I Prince Mohamed), al-Maliki said that Abbas briefed the Sultan on preparations for the proposed Annapolis conference on Middle East peace. Al-Maliki told the Bulletin that he expected Palestinian and Israeli teams to negotiate an agreed document prior to the meeting, to be endorsed at Annapolis "by over 30 countries that will attend the conference, including Malaysia and Indonesia." Al-Maliki expected such endorsement to be followed by "detailed negotiations on Palestine's six (sic) pending issues including Jerusalem, refugees, settlements, borders, and security." He expected that if those negotiations were successful within an agreed timeframe, Abbas would hold a referendum on a treaty and if approved it could lead to "the end of the conflict."

¶5. (U) Asked if Brunei would be present at Annapolis, al-Maliki replied that the members of the PA delegation did not hear any such desire expressed by their hosts, but if the GOB sought an invitation "we would welcome such a request and will pass it to the Americans." He said that India, South Africa, and Brazil would be among countries invited, and the PA had also informed the USG that "other countries like Greece, Spain, Mexico and Switzerland have shown their interest to attend." Al-Maliki added that the PA delegation had informed the Bruneians that the PA had "agreed with

BANDAR SER 00000320 002 OF 002

Malaysia, Indonesia, and Turkey and others to set up a bilateral mechanism to brief and update them" on negotiations with Israel, and the PA was willing to keep the GOB briefed as well if it so desired. Finally, al-Maliki said that Abbas and the Sultan had also discussed the PA's internal conflict with Hamas.

LOOKING PAST ANNAPOLIS TOWARD PARIS?

¶6. (C) The French Ambassador shared with us his opinion that Abbas' visit to Brunei may have had less to do with Annapolis than with the December donors conference in Paris that had been proposed by Special Envoy Blair, French FM Kouchner, and Norwegian FM Stoere. He told Ambassador that the GOB was included on a list of 60 potential invitees to the Paris conference that the French Government had received from the PA. The French Ambassador suspected that Abbas included Brunei on his Southeast Asian itinerary in order to encourage the GOB to attend the donors conference and be generous in its response.

¶7. (C) On the other hand, in a separate conversation the Omani Ambassador told us that he met with PA Representative Abu Ghoush during the Abbas visit, and that Abu Ghoush complained of having had little luck prying donations out of the GOB in the past and was not optimistic that this would change much in the future. The Omani told Ambassador that when he asked Abu Ghoush what was the primary motivation for Abbas' current trip, the Palestinian cited the need for the PA to gain widespread support among Islamic countries for the Annapolis conference. Brunei, he said, had been included as one more possible source of political support, not primarily to seek financial aid. Abu Ghoush also told the Omani that the PA believed the "Hamas Foreign Minister" made an unpublicized visit to Brunei last year and that Abbas wanted to counter directly what the Hamas rep might have said about his group's conflict with Fatah during that alleged trip.

COMMENT

¶8. (C) Notwithstanding Abu Ghoush's remarks to the Omani, we agree that Abbas was probably here at least in part to look for GOB financial support. It is even possible that he sought the Sultan's personal help to help the PA through the financial hurdles it must overcome to meet its December payrolls. The GOB has traditionally channeled official aid to the Palestinians through UN agencies to avoid inadvertently supporting terrorist-related entities or becoming entangled in internal PA politics. The Sultan, however, has occasionally drawn on his considerable personal assets to discreetly help out governments headed by fellow Islamic leaders in response to their personal pleas, and may have been willing to do so again for Abbas. Although the MEPP is usually viewed through the optic of Islamic solidarity here and as such is a highly visible and emotional issue, given the Bruneian preference for keeping a low profile we do not expect that the GOB will seek to be invited to Annapolis or play a prominent role in Paris. End Comment.

SKODON